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PART WAY THERE

The findings of the LIP's Immigrant Integration Research Project reveal a lot about where we're at—and that will help get us to where we want to be.

Ahmed Nabeel Alvi has had first-hand experience with one of the key findings of the Surrey LIP's Immigrant Integration Research Project. Before coming to Canada from Pakistan in 2013, he worked as a trainer and a project manager in the nonprofit sector. Since arriving he's been able to find work, but only in customer service jobs. "There is a huge disconnect," he believes, between the >



(Part Way There: continued)

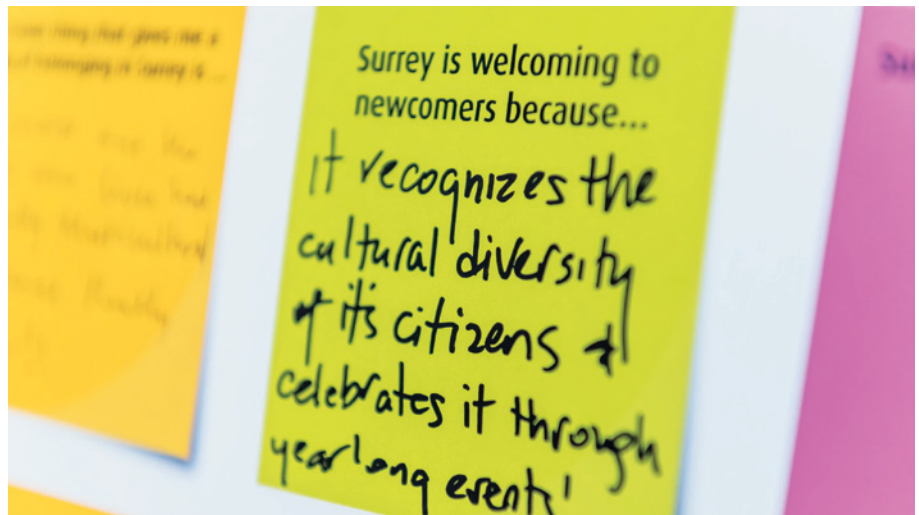
➤ kinds of jobs a lot of immigrants are qualified for, and the kind they're streamed into. "I've been directed towards a job as a roofer," he says. "It's very frustrating."

The research project identified 10 points that it calls Key Findings & Emerging Themes (see "The Big 10" on page 3), and the one that stood out to Alvi is: "Access to Employment is a Key Issue for Newcomers."

The project summary further explains that Alvi's experience appears to be all too common. A telephone survey found that "immigrants are more likely to feel they have more difficulty finding employment to match their education, skills, and abilities than do Canadian-born residents." Subsequent focus groups elicited further agreement, with many participants reporting "significant difficulties and feelings of frustration when trying to secure suitable employment." Wrapping up this particular key finding, the report concluded that "There is a risk that immigrants who experience, what they consider, unfair treatment through the job search process are more likely to feel unwelcome in Surrey, and to see discrimination as a norm."

Alvi, needless to say, concurs.

The research project will form an important basis for the development and implementation of the Surrey Immigrant and Refugee Settlement Strategic Plans, which the LIP is now about to embark upon. For



this reason it was important that quantitative research compiled via the telephone survey be backed up with individual stories from the focus groups, explains Noha Sedky of CitySpaces Consulting, the primary contractor. "The value of doing different types of research is that there were clear themes, with a lot of corroboration," she says.

The contractor worked closely with a committee made up of LIP members, who helped steer the nature of the research. "The committee really wanted an emphasis on youth," says Sedky. Accordingly, there were four youth advisors who facilitated events and focus groups and had input into a youth-specific report.

The project was also designed to gather impressions from non-immigrants, and from longer-term as well as more recent immigrants. Interestingly, native-born Canadians held almost identical opinions to those of newcomers across a wide range of issues. Their primary point of departure revolved around the future growth of Surrey's immigrant population, with native-born residents more cautious about how high the concentration should be. There were also some differences

between long-term and newly arrived immigrants, Sedky notes. "New immigrants were more positive."

With a study such as this, interpretation is definitely part of the puzzle, Sedky says. For example, regarding racism and discrimination, she notes, "Most people

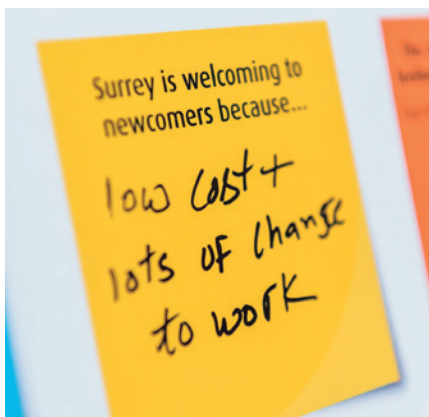
have had some experience with it, but they didn't let it taint their overall impression. That's good, but it means that there is more work to be done."

Similarly, ethnic enclaves provoked a mixed response. On one hand they can provide support and

a more familiar environment to ease the arrival of new immigrants. On the other, they may make it harder to interact with Canadian society. That squares with the findings of a recent study by University of British Columbia professor Daniel Hiebert, who after researching Canadian ethnic enclaves in Surrey and elsewhere, concluded that, while there are some negatives, the advantages to settling close together perhaps outweigh them, and enclaves are places of cultural diversity more than cultural isolation.

Overall, the project identifies many positives about immigrant integration in

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Surrey, but Sedky feels that the report accurately reflects a reality that is not always easy for immigrants. “We heard some hard stories in those focus groups, but newcomers are very determined,” she says. She concurs with Alvi when it comes to putting job finding at the top of the list. “Employment is the really tough one,” she says. “If you’re not suitably employed, everything is affected.”

This is another instance where the opinions of survey respondents and focus group members agree with more qualitative data ranging from employment statistics to the work of University of Winnipeg professor Lori Wilkinson, who found that about one-quarter of immigrants in B.C. say it has been difficult to find a job that matches their qualifications.

The Immigrant Integration Research Project is one of three major research initiatives undertaken by Surrey LIP

in preparation for the construction of Surrey’s Immigrant and Refugee Settlement Strategic Plans, to be initiated next year. The other two research projects deal with refugee settlement and, perhaps fittingly, the local labour markets. Beyond the important findings of this project, Sedky says she was highly inspired by many of the people she met while working on the project, and hopes that there will be an opportunity to check back in with many of them as strategies are developed.

One of those was Alvi, who participated as a focus group member and is embracing the immigrant experience, even though it has been difficult for him. A blogger, he recently posted an entry on why immigrants need a parachute. Finding a mentor is one important step, he suggests. At Surrey LIP we hope that the actions arising from the Immigrant Integration Research Project can provide additional ones.

ONCE AROUND THE BLOCK PARTY

Our Immigrant Advisory Roundtable is organizing an event that is very much in keeping with the Immigrant Integration Project.



There were nods of affirmation from many of the 18 people on our Immigrant Advisory Roundtable when the results of the Immigrant Integration Project were released. The Roundtable was established during the first few months of the LIP’s existence and has proved to be an invaluable asset. The 18 members originated in 16 different countries and provide links to many of Surrey’s various immigrant communities, but perhaps even more importantly, their experiences offer a window into those of others.

Among the key findings of the project was that Surrey residents, whether (*Once Around the Block Party: cont. on page 4*)

The Big 10

These are the key findings and emerging themes identified by the Immigrant Integration Research Project:

- 1 Overall, Surrey is seen as a welcoming community.
- 2 Services and programs for immigrants are key to making newcomers feel welcome.
- 3 Access to employment is a key issue for newcomers.
- 4 Immigrants must be encouraged and supported in their efforts to learn English.
- 5 For many residents, not only immigrants, their sense of belonging could be strengthened.
- 6 Having things to do & places to do them helps people connect and feel a stronger sense of belonging.
- 7 People want to connect across cultures, but struggle to do so.
- 8 Residents are split on whether discrimination is a problem or not.
- 9 Immigration is seen as good for Surrey, but less so by Canadian residents.
- 10 Ethnic enclaves are seen to both help and hinder immigrant integration.



immigrants or native-born, would like to reach across cultures but find they have difficulty doing so. Very true, agreed Roundtable members—so let's do something about it. And that, more or less, is how the Surrey LIP City Centre Block Party was born.

Envisioned as an opportunity to "have fun and learn from each other in order to improve a sense of belonging and inclusion to the community and enhance understanding of different cultures," the event is slated for September 25 (3:30 to 7:30 p.m.) at Surrey City Hall Plaza. It has been planned and organized by Roundtable members, led by coordinators Dongmei "Lily" Yang and Wafa Al-Jabiri. "I really want to help people," says Yang. "And I hope this will be the start of something important"

An English teacher in China, Yang arrived in Canada in 2006, and like so many immigrants, has found it difficult to find work appropriate to her qualifications. Instead she has worked mostly in retail, but recently left to return to school part-time and to volunteer with organizations including the Surrey LIP.

Preparations for the block party began

Preparations for the block party began several months ago, and involved seeking sponsorships from or partnerships with at least a dozen different organizations.

several months ago, and involved seeking sponsorships from or partnerships with at least a dozen different organizations. "I'm surprised at how many agreed to participate," says Yang. Funding has been obtained from the Vancouver Foundation, VanCity Credit Union and the City of Surrey; several City of Surrey departments as well as a

number of community agencies and post-secondary institutions are participating. The party will feature food, live music and performances, and cultural, artistic and children's activities of many kinds.

Yang says that countless hours of volunteer work have gone into organizing the event. Surrey LIP coordinator Olga Shcherbyna says that it's been gratifying to see things come together so smoothly, and hopes that the experience will lead to events such as this fanning out throughout the city. "Next year maybe some of them will decide to do something similar on the blocks where they live," she says. "There has been so much expertise gained, and the desire to connect is very strong."

For more information: www.SurreyLIP.ca

Steering Committee Member Organizations

These are the organizations that provide leadership direction to the Surrey Local Immigration Partnership.

- 1 City of Surrey
- 2 The Surrey Board of Trade
- 3 Alexandra Neighbourhood House
- 4 Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC (ASTTBC)
- 5 City of Surrey, Human Resources
- 6 City of Surrey Social Planning (Contract Manager)
- 7 City of Surrey, Parks, Recreation & Culture
- 8 Surrey Libraries
- 9 DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society
- 10 Training Group at Douglas College
- 11 Human Resources Management Association (HRMA)
- 12 Fraser Health Authority: Population and Public Health
- 13 Fraser Health Authority: Primary Health Care
- 14 Immigrant Employment Council of BC
- 15 Immigrant Services Society of BC
- 16 Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- 17 Oak Avenue Neighbourhood Hub Society
- 18 Options Community Services Society
- 19 Pacific Community Resources Society
- 20 Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS)
- 21 Semiahmoo House Society
- 22 SFU Surrey
- 23 S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Surrey Delta Service Centre
- 24 Surrey School District #36
- 25 Surrey RCMP
- 26 Sources Community Resources Society
- 27 Surrey Interfaith Council
- 28 Umoja Operation Compassion Society
- 29 Vancity Credit Union
- 30 YMCA

LIP UPDATES

Read Our Blog

Our new blog features articles and information from fellow Surrey residents. Check our website!

Block Party

Read all about it on page 3. Read even more on our

website. Attend it at City Hall Plaza on September 25, 3:30-7:30 pm.

Stakeholder Consultations

Over the fall the Surrey LIP will be convening five invitation-only consultations to

identify strategy priorities and action plan elements.

New Project Assistant

SFU student Tuma Altokhais is working with us as a part time Project Assistant through the fall.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Let us answer with a word that sums up a lot of what we're about: **Welcome!**

There are many ways to get involved with the Surrey Local Immigration Project, whether as an organization or as an individual. Surrey LIP will host city-wide community consultations and everyone is welcome to join. You can also request to be on our Surrey LIP stakeholder list and receive updates on a regular basis.

Please contact **Olga Shcherbyna**, Surrey LIP Coordinator, for more information.
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